

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SAN SALVADOR 000052

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/05/2016

TAGS: [ES](#) [MX](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IMMIGRATION](#)

SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR: GOES VIEWS REGARDING UPCOMING MEXICO
MEETING ON U.S. IMMIGRATION LEGISLATION

Classified By: Ambassador H. Douglas Barclay, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Ambassador has on several recent occasions discussed with Salvadoran Foreign Minister Francisco Lainez a planned January 9 meeting on U.S. immigration policy to be held in Mexico City; it will likely include foreign ministers of Mexico, Central America, and the Dominican Republic. Foreign Minister Lainez has stressed the importance of proactive U.S. engagement on such matters, and appears ready to offer El Salvador's influence and leadership in forestalling criticism of the U.S., and to moderate debate at this and similar future meetings. In his public pronouncements, President Saca has been circumspect in his reaction to recent proposed changes in U.S. immigration policy, and has called for multilateral dialogue and cooperation to replace heated rhetoric. END SUMMARY.

2 (C) Lainez phoned the Ambassador January 2 and asked for a meeting the following day. During the hour-long January 3 meeting, the Foreign Minister indicated that he expected the foreign ministers of Guatemala, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic would join himself and Mexican Foreign Minister Derbez at the January 9 meeting; he expressed his concern that the meeting might adopt "an aggressive stance" against the United States. Lainez opined that it would be a mistake if Derbez were to chair any such regional meetings in the future relating to immigration issues, but in response to repeated questions regarding who might provide more moderate leadership, he was unable to provide any definite answer, and off-handedly suggested Costa Rica as a possibility. (Note: At present, it appears that Costa Rica will not attend the January 9 meeting in Mexico. End note.) He added that whoever leads the group should have "the proper tools"--i.e., direct high-level access in the State Department and elsewhere within the USG.

13. (C) The Foreign Minister suggested that the USG should seek dialogue with the governments of Mexico, Central America, and the Dominican Republic on immigration issues and try to find common ground, and that regional meetings on immigration, properly handled, could represent a foreign policy opportunity for the U.S. rather than a public-relations threat. Lainez again stressed the importance of multilateral dialogue to any satisfactory solution, and suggested that a meeting between U.S. officials and their Mexican, Central American, and Dominican Republic counterparts would be very helpful. He believes that the proposed criminalization of illegal immigration will be a particular sore point for Mexico and others, and he thinks that the January 9 meeting may see proposals to hire public relations firms and/or lobbyists to oppose such legislation.

14. (C) In a January 4 conversation, Foreign Minister Lainez outlined to the Ambassador his view that, given the region's geographic proximity to the United States and the rise of leftist populism in Latin America, greater multilateral accord on issues such as immigration deserved the USG's highest-priority attention. He also related that illegal immigration should be seen in the light of a "supply and demand" problem, and that as long as job opportunities existed in the U.S. for Salvadorans and other illegal aliens, they would find some way to reach the U.S.

15. (C) Lainez phoned the Ambassador January 5 prior to a widely-publicized press conference of President Saca, and outlined that, in response to recent criticism by Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) legislators of recent toughening of U.S. lawmakers' stance on illegal immigration, the President would acknowledge the United States' right to control its borders, and condemn the FMLN's strident criticism. The President did so during his remarks, saying that although he felt that U.S. construction of a wall would fall short of addressing the complexities of illegal immigration, he "wasn't going to cry" about it. He underscored the warm friendship between El Salvador and the U.S., and expressed hope that Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which benefits some 250,000 Salvadorans, would be extended again. On January 6, Lainez informed the Ambassador that FMLN deputies had tried to railroad through a Legislative Assembly resolution condemning proposed tightening in U.S. immigration policy, but that a call from President Saca to Legislative Assembly President Ciro Cruz Zepeda had headed off the attempt.

16. (C) COMMENT: Lainez is offering to serve in a leadership

role, directing highly-contentious discussion on sensitive immigration issues toward more constructive channels, and away from harsh criticism of the U.S. Lainez and the Saca administration clearly support the United States' right to control its borders. An opportunity exists for the Department to avail itself of El Salvador's sympathetic position and get its message to other governments in the region. END COMMENT.
Barclay